



DIVERSITY OPPORTUNITY AND INCLUSION

Strategic Plan

July 1, 2025



INTRODUCTION

At the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), our mission is to improve the employment, quality of life, security, and independence of older Virginians, Virginians with disabilities, and their families. Through the efforts of the six program areas outlined below, we are here to support Virginians' efforts to secure independence, inclusion, and integration within their communities.

- **Disability Determination Services (DDS)** processes disability benefits claims to help Virginians attain financial security
- **Adult Protective Services (APS)** ensures the safety and security of vulnerable older adults and individuals with disabilities
- **Office for the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman (OSLTCO)** is the voice for those who often cannot speak for themselves ... we listen, inform, assist, investigate, and advocate
- **Division for Aging Services (DAS)** strives to improve the lives of older Virginians to live independently longer and participate fully in their communities
- **Division for Community Living (DCL)** maximizes independence for people with disabilities across the Commonwealth
- **Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS)** provides Vocational Rehabilitation Services to assist individuals with disabilities obtain employment

The Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) is a vocational-educational facility which is operated under the scope and mission DARS, specifically the Division of Rehabilitative Services. WWRC assists Virginians with disabilities from across the Commonwealth enter the workforce through our comprehensive vocational rehabilitation programs.

In 2021 the DARS leadership team committed to "Shaping the DARS Culture" that included a renewed emphasis on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (*DEI*) throughout the agency. We firmly believe that achieving diversity and inclusiveness in the workplace is a fundamental part of fulfilling our mission. Working to achieve an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment has numerous demonstrated benefits, including:

- Enhanced creativity
- Faster and more efficient problem solving
- Better and more productive communications
- Enhanced programs and services to constituents

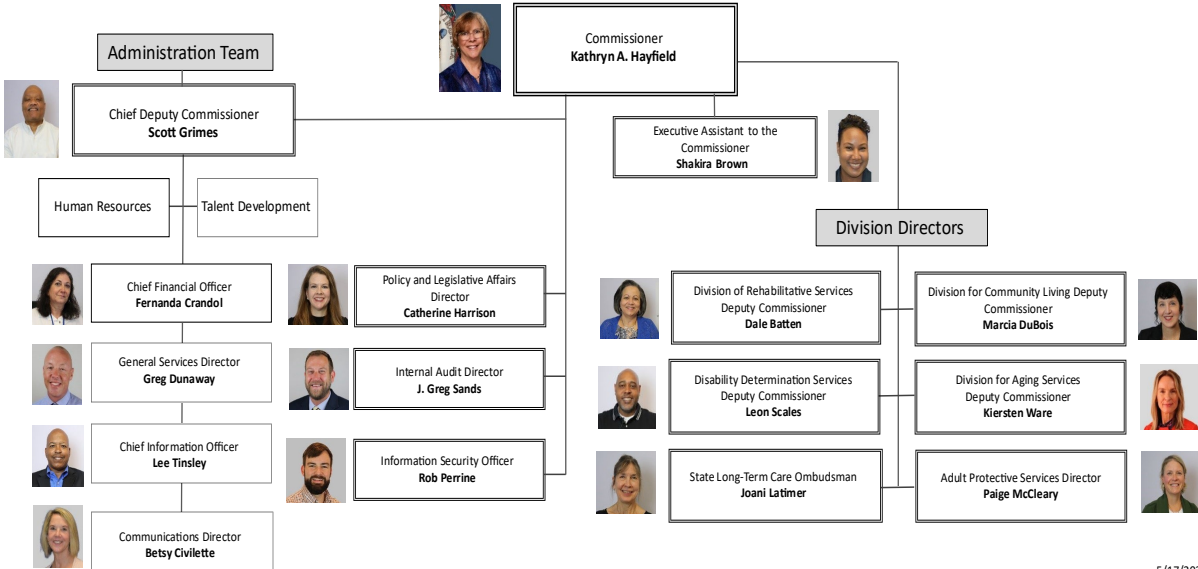
This strategic plan formally demonstrates our commitment to fully embrace the goals and initiatives of the Commonwealth. DARS will encourage and engage all employees throughout the agency to join in our efforts of working together to become a better us.

In the words of DARS Commissioner Kathy Hayfield

"Diversity and inclusion are not just buzzwords to me. Embracing these principles as part of our agency values helps create a culture that reflects the communities we serve. This helps us better fulfill our mission. A welcoming and engaged workplace, that accepts us all as we are, happens as a result of purposeful effort and commitment - by everyone. DARS' Leadership and I envision an agency that not only reflects differences, but one that values all gifts and talents and ensures that everyone has the opportunity to contribute and grow."



LEADERSHIP/DIVISIONS



5/17/2025

Workforce Demographics

From the leadership team to every employee between Abingdon and Norfolk, DARS is proud to have a diverse team of talented and dedicated individuals to comprise its overall workforce. As of June 14, 2025, DARS (including WWRC) has 1157 employees (1078 classified and 79 wage). The statistical demographics below highlight some of the unique features and characteristics of the dynamic DARS & WWRC workforce:

<p><u>Gender</u></p> <p>73% females 27% males</p>	<p><u>Race/Ethnicity</u></p> <p>American Indian: <1% Asian: 4% Bi-Racial: 2% Black: 24% Hispanic or Latino: 4% Pacific Islander: 0% White: 65%</p>	<p><u>Age</u></p> <p>Silent Gen (76-96): 1% Baby Boomer (57-75): 28% Gen X (41-56): 41% Millennials/Gen Y (25-40): 28% Gen Z (under 25): 2%</p>
<p><u>Pay Bands</u></p> <p>PB1: 1% PB2: 1% PB3: 18% PB4: 46% PB5: 23% PB6: 5% PB7: 1% PB8: <1% Other: 7%</p>	<p><u>Persons with Disabilities</u></p> <p>10% (voluntary self-disclosed)</p>	<p><u>Years of Service</u></p> <p>With DARS: Median 6 Years Average 9 Years (Longest 52 Years)</p> <p>With State: Median 8 Years Average 10 Years</p>
	<p><u>Veterans</u></p> <p>5%</p>	

DARS AND WWRC WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN

As of FY24 CATEGORY	DARS		WWRC		COMBO	
	%	TOTAL	%	TOTAL	%	TOTAL
Sex						
Male	23.56%	225	41.09%	83	26.62%	308
Female	76.44%	730	58.91%	119	73.38%	849
Race / Ethnicity						
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.21%	2	0.50%	1	0.26%	3
Asian	4.08%	39	0.99%	2	3.54%	41
Black/African American	28.27%	270	6.44%	13	24.46%	283
Hispanic or Latino	4.19%	40	2.48%	5	3.89%	45
Bi-racial	0.94%	9	0.00%	0	0.78%	9
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
White/Non-Hispanic	60.00%	573	88.12%	178	64.91%	751
Persons with Disabilities						
	9.8%	94	10.89%	22	10.0%	116
Veterans						
	4.71%	45	4.46%	9	4.7%	54
Pay Bands						
1	0.00%	0	2.97%	6	0.52%	6
2	0.21%	2	1.98%	4	0.52%	6
3	15.81%	151	26.73%	54	17.72%	205
4	48.06%	459	35.15%	71	45.81%	530
5	25.45%	243	11.39%	23	22.99%	266
6	5.24%	50	2.48%	5	4.75%	55
7	0.73%	7	0.00%	0	0.61%	7
8	0.10%	1	0.00%	0	0.09%	1
Other (Wage & At-Will Staff)	4.40%	42	19.31%	39	7.00%	81
Age						
Silent Gen (76-96)	0.63%	6	2.48%	5	0.95%	11
Baby Boomer (57-75)	25.76%	246	40.59%	82	28.35%	328
Gen X (41-56)	41.57%	397	40.59%	82	41.40%	479
Millennials/Gen Y (25-40)	30.47%	291	13.86%	28	27.57%	319
Gen Z (under 25)	1.57%	15	2.48%	5	1.73%	20
Years of Service						
With Agency (Median)	6		7		6	
Average	8.8		9.6		8.9	
Longest	52		51		52	
With State (Median)	7		8		8	
Average	9.9		11.1		10	

Commonwealth of Virginia

Diversity Opportunity and Inclusion Plan

On January 19, 2022, Governor Youngkin signed Executive Order 10, which provided a concrete plan to further strengthen and focus the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and to include the promotion and expansion of equal opportunity for all Virginians in the Office's work. The inclusion of Opportunity is a critical factor in making Virginia the best place to live, work, and raise a family. Since the first days of the Youngkin Administration, the Commonwealth has dedicated resources to promoting ideas, policies, and practices that improve quality of life and expand economic opportunities for Virginians. At the same time, this plan and the programs and policies to promote Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion (DOI) within the Commonwealth's agencies and authorities have significantly expanded.

In 2000, the Equal Employment Opportunity policy (*DHRM, Policy Number 2.05*) was implemented to promote respectful workplace and non-discrimination practices. Since that time, plans have evolved to address changing social and economic conditions, with Virginia state government becoming more diverse—even more diverse than the Commonwealth overall.

Our focus is to continue to increase opportunities for all Virginians. The goals and objectives below build upon the plan --- and the promise --- of Executive Order 10. They continue our focus on creating a culture of inclusion where all Virginia state employees are recognized for their contributions, further provide the opportunity for growth through skills development to achieve both personal and professional goals, and institute regular employee engagement surveys to allow leaders to obtain feedback on a regular basis.

The Commonwealth's DOI goals and objectives are intended to provide guidance for agencies to establish measurable objectives that align with agency business operations and mission.

Goal 1: Access and Success

Recruit and retain a diverse workforce by increasing access to diverse populations for recruiting.

Objective 1: *Continue to improve hiring processes and increase access to potential applicants from diverse populations.*

Objective 2: *Continue to retain and promote a diverse workforce.*

Goal 2: Welcoming and Respectful Culture

Create and sustain a culture that welcomes and embraces diverse opinions, independent thinking, and respectful interactions to deliver optimal results for the organization and its customers.

Objective 1: *Persist in creating and maintaining a climate that is supportive and respectful and that values and integrates differing perspectives and experiences.*

Objective 2: *Continue to provide an environment where conflicts, concerns, and complaints are aired and addressed expeditiously.*

Goal 3: State Agency DOI Infrastructure & Training

Maintain a plan and infrastructure that continues to provide individualized skills training and career development for state employees. Agencies report annually on DOI goals and accomplishments.

Objective 1: *Continue to amplify opportunities to advance the goals outlined in this framework.*

Objective 2: *Continue to create structures and processes of accountability to increase organizational effectiveness with the Department of Human Resource Management.*

Objective 3: *Continue to provide training and educational workshops available to all employees.*

DARS COMMITMENT TO THE COMMONWEALTH'S DOI PLAN

DOI actions and initiatives are not fleeting trends or isolated efforts at DARS, but rather a coordinated collection aimed at fulfilling the goals and objectives of the Commonwealth. This approach also ensures that the DARS culture remains rooted in our Values (*customer service, innovation, accountability, engagement, and DEI*) and thrives as we carry out the DARS Mission to improve the employment, quality of life, security, and independence of older Virginians, Virginians with disabilities, and their families.

This plan serves as the foundation of the DARS DOI Journey and provides an overview of our recent, on-going, and future DOI actions and initiatives to achieve the desired results.

Goal 1: Access and Success – Agency and Division Actions and Initiatives

- The DDS Internship Program was launched in 2023 to provide a talent pipeline to help address recruitment and retention challenges and give higher education students an opportunity to gain awareness and exposure to disability adjudication as a potential career field. This program furthers the agencies' goal of integrating differing perspectives and experiences. DDS brought on six interns in 2023, ten in 2024, and will be looking to expand the program in 2025 and beyond.
- The HireVue hiring platform is used by DDS to increase access to potential new hires through an end-to-end hiring platform. The software streamlines the hiring process and can help predict future success in potential employees through their traits and skills. Since its inception June 2022, HireVue has captured over 1,000 video interviews, resulting in the hiring of over 200 staff.
- The DDS Talent Acquisition Specialist position was established in January 2023 to manage branding/marketing efforts for DDS to enhance the agency's image, its mission, and promote overall public awareness of recruitment and hiring efforts.
- The 3-minute DDS recruitment video, "A Day in the Life of a DDS Analyst", was created to promote DDS reputation and attractiveness as a good employment opportunity.
- The DDS Referral Program is used to assist recruitment efforts by incentivizing current DDS employees to refer individuals as applicants for Analyst Trainee positions.
- HR continues to expand its agency-wide recruitment networks to include colleges who work with the blind and deaf population, Goodwill employment, VEC disabled and regular Vet reps, AARP, USMC, Job Corp (*16-24 low-income young adults*).
- With field offices across the Commonwealth, DRS recruits and hires counselors and other staff with differences in socioeconomic, geographic, and academic/professional backgrounds (*i.e. City of Covington, the second least populous city of Virginia with a population of 5,550 and a median annual income of \$30,000 for a single person*).
- DDS utilizes the Student Loan/529 College Contribution program to reimburse employees up to \$10,000 in student loan assistance and/or up to \$10,000 in 529 College Savings Plan Contributions on a one-time basis.
- DDS and DRS have established salary scales for all division positions and performs an annual salary review to ensure fair compensation among similarly situated employees and positions.
- DDS implemented the Backlog Reduction Project, an incentive program to encourage staff to assist in addressing the large volume of staged (*backlogged*) claims.
- DARS has an established employee recognition program to acknowledge employees' contributions to the overall objectives of the agency recognizing and rewarding exemplary work.
- DAS has partnered with HR to track retention rates for all employees and set baseline metrics to measure improvements.

Goal 2: Welcoming and Respectful Culture – *Agency and Division Actions and Initiatives*

- The DDS Continuous Innovation Team (C-IT) provides employees with opportunities to share ideas on ways to improve the division. A core group of innovation advocates develops the suggestions for viability and makes recommendations to division leaders for implementation.
- DDS District Directors provide a weekly overview of the district offices to include any upcoming events, reminders, training, and deadlines for the upcoming week.
- The DDS Social Committees arrange officewide events used to create and maintain a climate that is supportive and respectful and that values and integrates differing perspectives and experiences.
- The DDS Director holds annual in-person fireside chats at each of the five district offices to allow staff the opportunity to meet with senior leadership, ask questions, and share ideas.
- The DDS annual leadership conference is an opportunity for approximately 75 agency and division supervisors and leaders to attend leadership development sessions and training centered around the DARS values and culture.
- The DDS Semi-Annual Leadership Advancement Meeting is an opportunity for agency leaders to meet and discuss agency and division advancements, policies, processes, and procedures.
- DARS Talent Development coordinated an agency-wide training series on “The DARS Road Map to Wellbeing and Resiliency.”
- The DDS training team meets quarterly with training supervisors to discuss training material to ensure consistency and effectiveness in accordance with agency and division training policies. Improvements are made to training based on new policy, trends, and trainee/employee feedback.
- The DDS 4-1-1 newsletter is distributed to staff via email monthly and includes pertinent information such as updated policies and training topics in addition to a diversity corner that features a different diverse topic and highlights Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion.
- SharePoint is used across the agency as a place to secure, organize and share all the agency's training material, operating procedures, and pertinent agency information.
- All hands-on Deck Day is an agency wide initiative used in multiple divisions to bring employees into the office on the same day weekly to maintain the flow of ideas amongst all staff.
- DAS hosts a quarterly employee enrichment meeting that includes all 27 DAS employees and is designed to reinvigorate the team on a regular basis. The “All Hands Enrichment Activities” provides an opportunity to celebrate successes and positive impacts, enhance connections with the team, acknowledge with appreciation the talents and efforts of the staff, and build excitement for what’s to come.
- DARS continues to provide Windmills training to internal staff as facilitators of the material to help staff of all divisions be more inclusive and supportive of working with individual people with disabilities.
- DARS is committed to creating open and welcoming environments where staff are included in decision making, expressing opinions, and maintaining cultural and organizational values.
- A weekly 1:1 supervisor meeting is a recurring meeting held between the DDS supervisor and the staff on their team to build trust in a safe space, collaborate, ask questions, or discuss concerns.
- The DARS Open Door Policy and practice is geared toward encouraging staff to be open and transparent with all levels of management and leadership throughout the agency.

- DARS prioritizes direct communication between staff and all levels of leadership to address individual and agency culture concerns. Identified concerns are openly communicated with the goal to work toward collaborative and meaningful solutions. On a yearly basis DARS holds staff "Open Mic" sessions with leadership where staff can directly address concerns and ask questions. Personnel related matters are handled in consultation with HR and are addressed promptly.
- The DARS Employment Support Services team meets monthly to openly discuss activities, happenings and concerns that have occurred during that time frame. The ability to speak freely with no judgement creates a sustainable working environment for employees as well as having concerns addressed and a plan to be resolved. The opportunity to offer suggestions to each program to promote growth and independence is a key to maintaining a positive atmosphere and culture. The transition team meets weekly as well as ongoing meetings with manager. This collaboration allows for ongoing ideas, program growth, independence, as well as building confidence within the team. This structure creates a positive working environment and other creative ideas for growth within each area.

Goal 3: State Agency DOI Infrastructure & Training – Agency and Division Actions and Initiatives

- The DDS Stone Leadership Academy (SLA) is an 18-month long program for emerging leaders throughout the DDS Division. SLA is an on-the-job leadership development program that expands the growth of soft skills while addressing solutions to actual DDS division issues.
- The 12-month Employee Development and Growth through Education (EDGE) is a professional and personal development program for future DDS leaders.
- The DCL Program Director serves on the State Health Commissioner's Advisory Council on Health Disparity and Health Equity (ACHDHE) whose mission is to promote and advocate for the elimination of health disparities among all racial and ethnic minorities and other underserved populations in the Commonwealth.
- The DOI goals and objectives of this plan are intrinsically intertwined with the DARS Values and agency strategic plan.
- DARS promotes DHRM DOI training opportunities for all staff including level-specific topics such as Being an inclusive Manager and Hiring and Retaining Diversity.
- DARS uses the Commonwealth of Virginia Learning Center (COVLC) to deliver online self-study training topics to agency staff.
- DARS is 100% committed to ensuring that courses in the COVLC are fully accessible to all state employees and apprises DHRM when specific training and components are not accessible as required by the ADA.
- DARS staff facilitates recurring lunch-and-learn training sessions to provide new and/or updated trainings to agency staff on various topics.
- The DDS Initial Skills Training is an extensive training used to teach new DDS employees how to review and make medical decisions on Social Security disability applications.
- The NADE/VADE National Training is an annual conference attended by DDS staff that is geared toward providing disability examiners with training on various new and updated disability related topics.
- Refresher Skills, New Claim Types, and Advanced Skills Training are provided by the DDS training team to refresh analyst knowledge in previously trained skills, introduce the disability analyst to new claim types and new skills and to continue learning in advanced skills and policies.

- The DDS Mentorship Program facilitates the pairing of experienced individuals with less experienced staff to provide guidance, support, and knowledge transfer of agency and division information, policies, and procedures.
- The DDS 1:1 Remediation training is administered by the supervisor and aims at addressing learning gaps for agency staff, retraining basic initial skills, and addressing any performance deficiencies.
- Supervisory Essentials is a 2-day training program offered to new and experienced supervisory level staff to ensure they have all the necessary tools to learn, lead, and manage others within the organization.
- DARS facilitates agency wide trainings on resilience and wellbeing at work across divisions through our collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania's Masters of Applied Positive Psychology program. In year one of this work, we tied the importance of mattering at work to the DARS values and introduced the work to over 100 DARS leaders at the BOLD reunion. Since then, we have held agency wide lunch and learns as well as unit specific trainings as requested. We are actively working with the DARS Talent Development team to provide a statewide train the trainer in May on the VIA Inventory of Strengths Assessment to help identify managers and supervisors character to lead with a lens towards "Strength Spotting". The plan is for a DRS focused train the trainer in early May and then to roll it out to the rest of the agency.
- DARS provides training on virtual training skills, how to work with coworkers, and other education training to employees throughout the agency.
- DARS provides training to help staff understand how to use tech items such as Microsoft bookings, SharePoint, and other items for a diverse workforce.
- DARS is committed to thorough and comprehensive staff training. New Counselor Skills Training, a comprehensive and intensive skill development training was re-imagined and strengthened in 2023. On a weekly basis staff are provided a comprehensive list of all available training opportunities both internally as well as offered through national training partners. In April 2024 field leadership engaged in a specialized clinical supervision training facilitated by George Washington University.
- The DARS transition team provides ongoing training and understanding of the Pre ETS world and the best practices of working with students with disabilities. The team has developed and implemented virtual and face to face workshops and trainings within the agency as well as the vendors providing services. The transition team is also working with WWRC to incorporate opportunities for students that have expressed interest in specific vocational areas, or for those who are not certain of a particular pathway and want to explore options.
- Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is working with WWRC staff to improve their ability to serve the center's increasing population of students more effectively with an autism spectrum disorder.
- The DAS annual anonymous employee satisfaction survey includes questions surrounding employee development and training opportunities and gives staff the opportunity to provide feedback and input to improve the organization.
- BOLD Institute – Thirty-two (32) DARS leaders participated in the fifth annual BOLD Institute, March 24-28, 2025, at the Omni-Charlottesville Hotel. Launched in 2021 and modeled after VCU's Commonwealth Management Institute (CMI), BOLD is DARS' premier professional developmental opportunity that cultivates a "One DARS" perspective, strategic networks, and a ready talent pipeline. The Institute also features BOLD alumni who come back each year as presenters, coaches and "One DARS" ambassadors. With our 157 BOLD graduates, we are building outstanding leaders at

DARS who focus on self- and other awareness, business acumen, critical thinking, communication, influence, and serve as the guidepost of our mission and values.

DARS DOI Goals and Objectives – Measures and Metrics

DARS maintains its commitment to developing and implementing objective measures and metrics for each DOI Goals that are fully aligned with our business operations and mission.

Goal #1 – Access and Success:

In addition to increasing the number of persons with disabilities hired throughout the agency and analyzing/reviewing other workforce demographics, to measure this goal, DARS looks at metrics such as agency and division retention and attrition rates as well as data on new hires and their integration into the agency.

Goal #2 – Welcoming and Respectful Culture:

To measure this goal, information on grievances and resolutions is analyzed/reviewed as well as information on the various agency and division pulse surveys and/or employee engagement surveys being conducted.

Goal #3 – State Agency DOI Infrastructure & Training:

This goal's measurement includes data from the COVLC and other training platforms on the number and type of trainings offered to and taken by agency and division employees.